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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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A-ONE #1205 01/29/10

~ Apple Unveils the iPad ~ People Are Talking! ~ Cyber Arms Race Is On!
~ Google Toolbar Spying! ~ Cable Modem Hacker Bust ~ New Facebook Probe!
~ Nintendo Still Hurting ~ Lost Planet 2 Coming! ~ eBay Changes Fees!

~ New Wii Mario A Record ~ Microsoft Uses Psystar! ~ PS3 Cracked Wide Open!

-* AmigaOS 4.1 Update 1 Released *-
-* Hacker Hits House, Insults Obama! *-
-* U.S. Won’t Back Away from Internet Freedom *-

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->From the Editor’s Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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I don’t haven’t anything "new" to talk about this week. Unfortunately, I’m tired from working six days in a row. I’m tired from the last week of frigid temperatures here in New England (but no real snow to speak of!). I have so much to do and little to no energy to do it! I know, it’s tough getting old(er)! Where have I heard that excuse before?! Any way, sit back and relax, keep warm, and enjoy this week’s issue!

Until next time...

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AmigaOS 4.1 Update 1 Released

It seems like only yesterday, but in fact it’s already six months ago. July last year, we published our review of AmigaOS 4.1 running on ACube’s sam440ep motherboard, and here we are, six months later, and Hyperion has released AmigaOS 4.1 Update 1. This free update brings with it quite a number of new features, and since I still have the sam440ep on my desk, I could test the new features first-hand.

The most important conclusion I drew in the AmigaOS 4.1 review was that while the AmigaOS is cool, fun, and a whole new world of technology to explore, it also felt like a relic, something that while looking nice and modern, felt more like something from yesteryear than today. This was not aided by the fact that AmigaOS 4.1 just "didn’t let me in", as I put it.

AmigaOS 4.1 seems to cater too much to the past, instead of looking forward. The developers are catering to the ever shrinking group of classic Amiga users, instead of trying to capitalize on the strengths of the platform to try and bring in new people like myself. I simply don’t get the idea that the developers are trying to advance the platform.

Well, a few things have happened since then (obviously not because of that silly review). The biggest news of course has been the unveiling of a brand new, high-end Amiga: the X1000. Accompanied by a rather intriguing marketing campaign, the X1000 has the Amiga community excited, and if there’s one community that deserved good news, it’s this one - if only because they remained loyal during the dark days years of lawsuits and

dirty infighting.

With new hardware comes new software. Hyperion, the company behind AmigaOS 4, has remained very tight-lipped about the software aspect of it all, but seeing the X1000 comes with components and features no other Amiga has ever had, it’s only logical to assume AmigaOS 4 is in for a serious round of improvements. Heck, the CPU alone would require an SMP implementation, and I’d say that justifies a jump to 5.0.

So, in 2010, we’ll have the X1000 covering the high end, while the sam440 from ACube will continue to cover the low end. Before we reach that dichotomy, however, Hyperion continues the development of AmigaOS 4.1 for the AmigaOne, Pegasos II, and sam440, and I can tell you - if this is a taste of what’s to come, then we’ll be having a good meal.

While most of the changes appear to be relatively minor, their impact is not. No better way to illustrate this than by looking at a new feature of Workbench: file manager windows now auto-update. In the original review, this was one of the many issues I had with the file manager, so I’m very glad to have it fixed. Amiga die-hards can still turn it off if they want to (why would you, though?).

Another one of those small changes that makes the AmigaOS feel a little more welcoming is having click-to-front enabled by default. On previous iterations of the operating system, the default behavior was that you had to specifically click the bring-to-front widget in a window’s titlebar; since this widget is tiny and often obscured by other windows, I found this quite frustrating. I guess I’m not the only one, since click-to-front is now enabled by default, allowing you to double-click anywhere in a window to bring it to front.

There are more far-reaching changes too, of course. There’s a whole new system-wide notification system (think Growl), something the AmigaOS didn’t have before. Intuition has seen improvements too, such as improved rendering, allowing for things like drop shadows on windows. Video memory consumption has also been reduced, and theme support has been improved (and a new theme included).

Workbench has seen more improvements than just the addition of the auto-update feature. A Startup preferences panel has been added so you no longer need to work with the WBStartup folder. Icons are now scalable, and a new icon set (beautiful!) has been included too.

We can also find a number of improvements when looking at the internals of the operating system. Stability has been improved on the sam440 (actually, AmigaOS 4.1 for sam is out of beta now), and the memory management system has been reworked to increase reliability and efficiency. Paging to and from the hard disk has been improved too. On top of that, hardware detection should be better now (DCC support!).

There’s more to this update than what has been mentioned here, so be sure to head on over to Hyperion’s website to get the details.

Overall, this free update brings quite a number improvements to the AmigaOS, although none of them are earth-shattering. Still, this update shows that Hyperion is willing to make changes to how the AmigaOS works, even if that means altering decades-old customs. With the brand new hardware on its way, this is very good news indeed.

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho, friends and neighbors. This is going to be on the short side, since I'm battling some kind of bug. It feels like some kind of mild flu, but who knows? It could just be something I ate coming back to kick me in the butt. As with most things, it'll pass. But for the time being, I feel like I've been pounded all over with a mallet and drained of anything even remotely resembling energy.

This week is going to be a sort of free-association pot-luck hodge-podge (too many hyphens?[grin]) of topics... just a collection of things I've been exposed to this week and just HAVE to vent about.

First of all, I'm tired of reading a supposedly intelligent, literate publication and seeing something stupid like "ten times less". Yes, this is one of my pet peeves. What they mean is "one tenth". THAT I can understand. "Doing the math" on it actually yields a concrete answer. For instance, if Johnny has $100 and Tommy as one tenth of what Johnny has... Tommy has $10, right?

But if Johnny has $100 and Tommy as 'ten times less', what exactly does Tommy have? What IS ten times less than $100??

This goes way beyond simple math 'tricks'... like... if Johnny has $100 and Tommy has $150 (hey, let's let Tommy be ahead for once, right?[grin]), then Johnny has 2/3 of what Tommy has, but Tommy has 50% more than Johnny... It all depends on which side you look at it from, right?

But with "Ten times less", no matter which side you look at it from, it's a nonsense statement. You can have ten times more of something, and you can have one tenth of something. You just can't have ten times less of something.

Okay. Another thing that ticks me off... these armchair 'climate experts'. I'm not talking about Granny Johnson who'll tell you that things are no different now than they were when she was a kid, but those in government and even in the scientific community who will point to one fact (or non-fact) or facet as proof that global warming either does or doesn't exist.

Further complicating things is the fact that the conservative end of the debate is split into two camps as well... either that global warming does not exist and is all a ploy by the liberal eco-lobby, or that it does exist but is a natural occurrence that we have no part in.

Well as answer to the latter, I ask only that you think about whether it MATTERS that it might be a natural occurrence. If, say, the American mid-west eventually became a desert devoid of vegetation, would it MATTER that it was a natural happening? Would that keep the cost of corn or wheat down? I didn't think so.

Then there are those who deny the whole thing, pointing to the fact that this has been a fairly cold winter. One of the funniest things I've ever heard David Letterman say was during one of his monologues... "Just a brief announcement, folks: Due to the blizzard, the conference on global warming has been canceled."

Yeah, well, I thought it was funny. [chuckle]

What these people either don't care about or fail to realize is that the 'global' part of "global warming" is there for a reason.

You can break the earth up into two distinct parts that interact. It's up to you whether you divide it up into land and sea, or northern and southern hemisphere, or surface and atmosphere. No matter which way you choose to divvy it up, the two parts have to interact in a particular way.

For instance... have you ever wondered why a place at a certain latitude in the southern hemisphere is warmer than a place at the same latitude in the northern hemisphere? It's because the southern hemisphere has more ocean than the northern hemisphere does. Ocean is different than dry land in a bunch of different ways... for the more republican among you, it's wetter for one thing.

For another, it holds heat better than land does. Another thing is that it's... fluid. It moves. That allows it to distribute the heat more easily than land. That's where the ocean currents come in. Some of the heat held in the southern oceans is transported north by currents. It's all a delicate balance. Once something disrupts the balance, lots of things change. Look at El Niˆ–o, or as it's more properly called, the El Niˆ–o-Southern Oscillation, is a 'pool' or warmer than average water in the Pacific Ocean. But it affects almost everything, making itself felt around the world. Less snow here, more snow there, colder here, warmer there... and you'd never know if you were a caveman in Spain 8,000 years ago that your snowy winter was caused by water less than a degree warmer than average half a world away.

I can't blame the less educated or less informed for saying "well, it's only a degree... what harm can THAT do?". I mean, think about it... you wouldn't pay any mind at all to your house temperature if it was a degree warmer today than it was yesterday, right? So what harm could a single degree do to this huge world?

But think about this... one calorie of energy is needed to raise the temperature of one cubic centimeter of water by one degree. Now think of the size of the typical El Niˆ–o "pool"... Let's call it 7,000 square kilometers. If we limit our math to the top centimeter of the El Niˆ–o pool, we're talking about 70,000,000,000,000 calories, or about 277,782,450,353 BTUs. That's a lot of BTUs. That's a lot of energy.

Okay, okay, I'll stop the science lesson. But there IS one other thing I want to mention. These things very seldom progress at a steady pace. Normally, getting started is the hard part. The only thing harder than getting it started is getting it stopped. As an example, let's think about there being enough extra heat in the northern hemisphere to decrease the ice cover by a mere 0.1%. Not a lot, right? Right. But what happens is that the water that's now not covered by ice is absorbing sunlight. Liquid water reflects much less sunlight than ice does. And to make it worse, water flows. It distributes that heat to, around and under that icepack, warming it and shrinking it more. More water, more absorbed

heat, more melting, more water, more absorbed heat, more melting.. well, you get the idea.

But that’s probably not the full extent of it! That kind of heating might well stop the currents from the equator that transfer heat, letting it build up in the southern hemisphere. That heat gets transferred to the atmosphere, changing the climate over Antarctica, Australia, parts of South America and Africa. The change in currents screws up weather all over the northern hemisphere too. First colder, then much drier, then maybe even colder, maybe hot an arid. It won’t matter at that point because things will be too dry to grow anything, the warmer ocean will release more carbon dioxide, plankton will start choking itself off in the oceans due to the heat, plant life will die and stop producing oxygen, animals will suffer. That’s us, by the way. So in the end, it really doesn’t matter whether global warming is a man-made problem or not.

Despite all this, what I hate most... what really ticks me off.. is when people chant "Save the planet!".

The planet is (sorry to you fundamentalists) four BILLION years old. I don’t think Mother Earth really cares what we do. No matter how bad we make things, She will still be okay. She’ll settle back and take her own sweet time and, when she’s ready, she’ll do her thing again. Whether it’s life or no life, she will be fine. Whether its a lush green growing biosphere or a barren, rocky frozen or fried world, she’ll be whatever she chooses... it’s just that we might not be a part of it.

Well, on that cheerful note, I’m going to leave you to think about it or not. That’s all for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Nintendo Hurting Despite Records!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Capcom’s Lost Planet 2!
  PS3 Cracked Wide Open!
  And much more!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Despite Record Sales, Nintendo Is Hurting

Nintendo’s Wii gaming console is still blasting its competition, with

sales reaching record levels during the 2009 holiday season, but the popular, motion-sensing system is losing ground to Sony’s PlayStation and Microsoft’s Xbox.

The Kyoto, Japan-based company saw revenues drop 9.4 percent and earnings drop 23 percent in the three-quarter period ending in December 2009, compared to last year, according to figures released Thursday.

In the fiscal year ending in March, the company anticipates a drop in profits from $6.1 billion last year to $4.1 billion.

Although holiday shoppers grabbed a whopping 3.81 million Wii systems, far more than the 1.31 million Xbox 360s and 1.36 million PlayStation 3 units sold in December, profits dropped because Nintendo lowered the console’s price from $250 to $200. Converting weak dollars into the stronger Japanese yen also impacted the company’s bottom line.

Although it introduced a new version of the DS portable console last year, overall sales of the handheld device were down about two million from the year prior, with more than 23 million sold. Wii sales reached more than 17 million in the period ending Dec. 31, about three million less than the previous year.

Nintendo’s troubles could be a sign that gamers are looking ahead to a new era.

"We are several years into the current generation of home consoles, and at this stage most of the people who want a Wii already have one," said Steve Koenig, director of industry analysis for the Consumer Electronics Association. "The reason Microsoft and Sony are gaining is because the Xbox 360 and the PlayStation are really media portals, and there is media content that comes with Xbox Live."

Koenig said the recent partnership of Nintendo with Netflix to offer streaming movies through the console reflects the trend that games alone are no longer enough.

"The Wii has had [online] weather and news before, but that’s pretty basic," said Koenig. "People are interested in having a device that can bring in rich media content like movies, music and YouTube."

While the Wii offers Wi-Fi Internet access, Koenig said that at a time when there’s an app or widget for everything, "People don’t want to sit there with a keyboard and browse . . . They want turn-key solutions to help them connect with the content they want."

A growing number of partnerships show that media companies are "creating their own walled gardens of content built around living-room-centric devices," said Koenig.

Although December was hailed as the best month ever for video-game sales, the industry overall has been lagging, with an eight percent drop in sales of hardware, software and accessories last year, from $21.4 billion to $19 billion.

When Apple CEO Steve Jobs unveiled the company’s much-anticipated iPad tablet computer on Wednesday, he demonstrated how its 1GHz processor and 9.7-inch screen would make it a great game platform. For now, most of the games available are expected to be larger versions of iPhone applications.

But as the inventory increases, it could mean more bad news for game console makers.

"I think the iPod touch has already encroached to some extent on portable gaming, the DS and the PSP," said Koenig. "I think the iPad may add to that incrementally."

Koenig noted that while portable game devices rely on games that sell for more than $20 in stores, the App Store has thousands of free games, and the most expensive ones cost less than $100 -- and all of them can be downloaded in seconds.

Capcom’s Lost Planet 2 Coming in May

Capcom plans to launch "Lost Planet 2" in May this year, it said Tuesday.

The game will appear in the U.S. and Europe on May 18 and in Japan on May 20, said the game’s producer, Jun Takeuchi, during a Tokyo news conference. The near-simultaneous launch marks a difference from the first edition of the game, which saw its release staggered over 2006 and 2007 in major markets.

The new version of the game will also feature characters Marcus Fenix and Dominic Santiago from "Gears of War," an action-shooting game published by Microsoft.

The announcement was one of several made by the Japanese game developer about its plans for Xbox 360 titles during 2010.

"Super Street Fighter 4," a follow-up to last year’s "Street Fighter 4" title, will be launched on April 17 in the U.S., April 28 in Japan and April 30 in Europe.

Capcom also said that "Monster Hunter," one of Japan’s most popular PC gaming titles, will appear on the Xbox 360 this year.

"Monster Hunter Frontier Online" will be released in the summer of this year and its appearance on the Xbox 360 represents something of a coup for Microsoft. Monster Hunter is an incredibly popular game franchise in Japan - it was the top-selling game of all 2009 on Amazon’s PC sales chart - but the Xbox 360 lags Nintendo’s Wii and Sony’s PlayStation 3 in third place in the Japanese market.

"Dead Rising 2," a gory game that sees players tape together objects to make weapons and then bash, slice, split or bludgeon zombies, was also demonstrated. Capcom said the game would be launched during 2010 but didn’t provide any additional details.

New Super Mario Bros Wii Tops 10 Million

Nintendo’s New Super Mario Bros Wii can claim ’fastest selling single game’ with some 10 million units sold worldwide, according to Nikkei Net. The Japanese business portal claims sales of Nintendo’s

multiplayer-oriented platformer exceeded 10 million units in sales through January, which marks the close of its initial eight weeks of availability. New Super Mario Bros Wii debuted in Australia on November 12, 2009, followed days later in North American and Europe, and wasn't launched in Japan until December 3.

Nikkei Net also said New Super Mario Bros Wii's 10 million figure made it 'the fastest for a single game'. Note that's only per-platform, however: Modern Warfare 2 has so far moved considerably more copies between the Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, and Windows versions.

With worldwide Wii unit sales topping 60 million, you could comfortably say one in six Wii gamers, or about 17 percent own a copy. Nikkei Net breaks the totals out regionally to 3 million copies in Europe, another 3 million in Japan, and 4.5 million in the US. Riffing on regional Wii console sales estimates, that's about 12 percent of Europeans, 31 percent of Japanese, and 15 percent of US Wii gamers.

By comparison, Super Mario Galaxy had only sold 8 million copies by March 2008, and Super Smash Bros Brawl slightly more with 8.43 million copies as of March 2009.

The most bestselling non-bundled Wii game? Wii Play, with over 24 million copies sold from its launch in December 2006 through the end of September 2009.

Once Impenetrable PS3 Cracked Wide Open

The first hacker to successfully jailbreak the iPhone says he has pulled off yet another modding marvel, this time penetrating the previously impervious PlayStation 3 gaming console.

The hack by 20-year-old George Hotz, aka geohot, is significant because the PS3 was the only game console that hadn't been hacked, despite being on the market for more than three years. The feat greatly expands the functionality of the box by allowing it to run unrestricted versions of Linux and a wide range of games that are currently forbidden. The hardware and software designer told El Reg it took him five weeks to develop the hack using a combination of modifications to the console's hardware and software.

"Basically, I used hardware to open a small hole and then used software to make the hole the size of the system to get full read/write access," he said in an interview. "Right now, although the system is broken, I have great power. I can make they system do whatever I want."

The first three weeks were spent trying attacks to directly access memory of the console. He eventually settled on his current approach after realizing software approaches alone were insufficient.

A dropout of the Rochester Institute of Technology, geohot said he is declining to provide details to prevent Sony from introducing changes that would stymie the modifications. But a blog post announcing the accomplishment makes clear the hack gives users unprecedented control over their systems.

"I have read/write access to the entire system memory, and HV level

access to the processor," geohot wrote. "In other words, I have hacked the PS3."

The hack will allow PS3 users for the first time to run unrestricted versions of Linux that have full access to the system's central processing unit and graphical processing unit. That will greatly expand the kinds of things users can do with the console. For starters, they could use the mod to run emulators that will play PS2 games on the machine, something Sony strictly forbids. It could also allow programs like the VLC media player to run much more robustly. The hack also opens the door to pirated games on the console, although geohot said that's an activity he's not interested in pursuing.

Geohot said he doesn't plan to release the software used to unlock the box until he can make it more reliable. It currently takes about 15 minutes to run and frequently fails to work properly. "If I posted what I have now, people would get fed up with it," he said.

He praised the PS3 as a "pretty secure system," that was harder to hack than many hardware systems he has penetrated.

"One of the main things Sony did right was put all the security on at once," he explained. "From day 1, the PS3 was secure."

By contrast, anti-hacking protections in the iPhone were rolled out over time, allowing him to gain important insights into the overall design that helped him defeat changes that were introduced later.

"If the iPhone right now was released as is, it would be much harder for people to crack," he said. "With the iPhone, when a new version comes out, we can decrypt it right away because we have exploits for the old version."

A native of Glen Rock, New Jersey, geohot rose to prominence in 2007, at the age of 17, when he developed the first hack to allow the iPhone to work on networks other than AT&T's. Even after Apple introduced changes designed to reestablish Apple's iron-fisted grasp of the device, geohot devised ways jailbreak newer versions, unleashing a never-ending cycle of hacks and counterhacks.

While hacks of the Xbox and the iPhone have led to thriving developer communities that release custom applications for the modded devices, geohot said the challenge of overcoming the security overshaddows those more practical outcomes.

"Personally, it's a win for me just to do it," he said. "It's just cool to have it cracked."

Microsoft Cites Psystar Case in Xbox Antitrust Defence

Remember that little legal spat going on between Apple and Psystar? That one's been more or less wrapped up, with Apple being the sole victor there. The dust from that case has barely had time to settle, and already we see another company quoting it to support its own restrictive, anti-consumer practices. The company in question? Ha, it's Microsoft.

In October 2009, Microsoft released an update for the Xbox 360 which

intentionally blocked 3rd-party (non-Microsoft) memory cards from working with the game console. UK-based Datel Design & Development, maker of 3rd party memory cards for the Xbox 360, then sued Microsoft, claiming it was engaging in anti-competitive practices. Datel sold 2GB memory cards for as low as 40 USD, whereas Microsoft's own 512MB cards go for about 30 USD, and on top of that, Datel used simple microSD cards, so you could backup data on your PC.

"Microsoft's purpose in disabling Datel's memory cards is to prevent consumers from choosing a Datel product that offers far better value for the price," Datel said November 2009, "There is no benefit to consumers from Microsoft's decision to target and disable Datel's memory cards. To the contrary, Microsoft's actions will leave approximately 50000 consumers with useless memory cards and (without the ability to access their data on the cards), forestall innovation, and deprive future consumers of the benefits of competition."

In the lawsuit, Datel argues that Microsoft monopolises the market for "Multiplayer Online Dedicated Gaming Systems", but it only gets there by stating that the Nintendo Wii is not part of that market, which is an arbitrary stretch. In its motion to dismiss, Microsoft correctly argues that not only should the Wii be added to that market, but also the PSP and Nintendo DS.

On top of that, Redmond argues that if Apple is allowed to block clone makers, Microsoft should be allowed to block third party accessories from working with the Xbox 360. They argue that the Xbox 360 comes with a software license that authorises Microsoft to disable unauthorised accessories, much in the same way Mac OS X comes with an SLA which prohibits you from installing it on non-Apple labelled computers.

"Xbox 360 purchasers knowingly and voluntarily gave Microsoft the right to prohibit the use of unauthorized accessories," Microsoft states, "Each Xbox 360 comes packaged with a software license requiring consumers to agree that the Xbox 360 software can be used only with Microsoft authorized accessories."

I find it incredibly hilarious that out of all companies in the world, Microsoft is the one to use the Psystar case to defend its own anti-consumer practices. This also happens to be the millionth nail in the coffin of the idiotic myth, propagated by Mac fans and Groklaw, that Microsoft is behind Psystar.

In any case, this is the world many Apple fans advocate. A world wherein your own products, for which you paid good money, get broken arbitrarily by manufacturers because they don't like competition. Like I said - it's a snowball effect. It starts with Apple blocking clone makers, but it will end with you not having any control whatsoever over your hard and software.

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US Will Not Back Away from Internet Freedom Push

The United States said Monday it will not back away from an Internet freedom push that has raised hackles in China amid a dispute between Beijing and Web giant Google over cyberattacks.

"We are aware that China has a different position with respect to restricting information," State Department spokesman Philip Crowley said.

"We think this is inconsistent with the information environment and prerequisites of the 21st century," Crowley told reporters.

"So we will continue to promote the free flow of information, unfettered access to information, the ability to have virtual freedom of association.

"These are all, we believe, fundamental tenets of the environment that we live in, and we will not back away from advocating that this should be something that all countries should promote," Crowley said.

The spokesman also recalled that US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton delivered a major policy speech on Internet freedom last week in which she talked about "being able to surf the Internet without restrictions."

Beijing lashed out at Clinton’s speech last week, saying it was "harmful" to relations, and a Chinese spokesman on Monday denied any state involvement in the cyberattacks which Google said originated in China.

The Internet giant has said that following the cyberattacks on the email accounts of Chinese human rights activists it is no longer willing to censor Web search results in China even it that means it has to leave the country.

A spokesman for China’s Ministry of Industry and Information Technology said Monday that the "accusation that the Chinese government participated in (any) cyberattack, either in an explicit or inexplicit way, is groundless and aims to denigrate China."

"China’s policy on Internet safety is transparent and consistent," the spokesman told state news agency Xinhua, saying the country with the world’s largest online community was itself the "biggest victim" of hacking.

The White House said last week that President Barack Obama was "troubled" by the Chinese-based cyberattacks on Google and other US companies and was seeking official answers.

The Google row, which erupted almost two weeks ago, has threatened to damage Sino-US ties, which are already dogged by trade and currency issues, US arms sales to Taiwan and climate change.

Hacker Breaks into 49 House Sites, Insults Obama

A hacker broke into 49 House Web sites of both political parties to post a

crude attack on President Barack Obama after his State of the Union address.

Jeff Ventura, spokesman for the House chief administrative officer, said the sites were managed by a private vendor - GovTrends of Alexandria, Va.

Most House Web sites are managed totally by House technicians but individual offices are permitted to contract with a third party to manage new features and updates.

Ventura says GovTrends let its guard down while performing an update, allowing the hacker to penetrate sites of individual members and committees overnight.

The attacker used an obscenity in referring to the president, who spoke from the House chamber Wednesday night.

Ventura said 18 House sites managed by GovTrends were defaced last August. The House is looking into continued use of the company, he said.

Phone messages left for GovTrends were not immediately returned.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Republican leader John Boehner wrote the House's chief administrative officer, Daniel Beard, ordering "an immediate and comprehensive assessment of how hackers were able to deface the Web sites of nearly fifty House members and committees last night."

They said an assessment must be made of GovTrends security - although the company was not named in the letter - and further ordered a review of security standards for all House contractors.

"We also request that you take immediate action to protect against breaches of the House firewalls and to ensure Web site security of all House offices," the leaders said.

China, US, Russia in Cyber Arms Race: Net Security Chief

China, the United States and Russia are among 20 countries locked in a cyberspace arms race and gearing up for possible Internet hostilities, according to the head of web security firm McAfee.

Dave DeWalt, chief executive and president of the US firm said the traditional defensive stance of government computer infrastructures has shifted in recent years.

"This movement from a defensive posture to a more offensive posture is just very obvious," he said on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

McAfee said it has identified at least five countries with cyber weapons, including the United States, China, Russia, Israel and France.

"We're now seeing 20 plus countries, governments arm themselves for cyber warfare, cyber espionage, cyber offensive capabilities," said DeWalt.

"There’s an arms race going on in cyberspace," he told AFP.

DeWalt is not the first to sound alarm bells about cyber warfare. The UN telecommunications agency chief Hamadoun Toure warned in October that the next world war could take place in cyberspace.

Pointing to the recent attack on Google, DeWalt noted that it illustrated a shift from espionage and attacks on government infrastructure to an offensive on structure that is "commercial in nature."

Google had threatened to pull out of China due to cyber attacks which it claimed originated in the Asian giant. The complaint has escalated into a major diplomatic row.

DeWalt said the attack on Google was "really one of the first government on commercial, and potentially highly sophisticated cyber espionage really focusing in on highly intellectual property companies like Google, Adobe."

The attack, dubbed Operation Aurora, has hit over 30 companies and the number of victim firms could still grow, said DeWalt.

But it was just one of "a series of highly escalated attacks in the last 12 months."

McAfee has seen a "more than 500 percent increase in net new malware" - harmful software such as spyware, viruses or trojans - in the past 12 months.

"That’s more malware than we have seen in the past five years combined," said DeWalt.

McAfee’s latest report compiling a survey of some 600 IT security executives found that 60 percent of those who responded believe representatives of foreign governments were involved in infiltrations of their infrastructure.

Some 36 percent said the United States posed the biggest threat to their infrastructure while 33 percent named China.

The survey also found that attacks are costing 6.3 million dollars a day, or 1.75 billion dollars a year, around the world.

Service outages brought about by attacks on web infrastructure are most costly for the oil and gas sector.

"As nation states and very sophisticated criminal organisations have piled into cyberspace to engage in activities designed to steal secrets or interrupt services, the private sector is increasingly caught in the crossfire," said Stewart Baker, who authored the report.

Despite the potential damage, governments appeared to be lagging behind in taking measures to get private sector to protect their web infrastructure.

Only China appeared to be "developing a relationship with their industry... in getting companies to adopt particular security standards," said Baker, who is a visiting fellow at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

Apple’s Jobs Unveils ’Intimate’ $499 iPad Tablet

Apple Inc. will sell the newly unveiled tablet-style iPad starting at $499, a price tag far below the $1,000 that some analysts were expecting.

The iPad, which is larger in size but similar in design to Apple’s popular iPhone, was billed by CEO Steve Jobs on Wednesday as "so much more intimate than a laptop and so much more capable than a smart phone."

Jobs, 54, a pancreatic cancer survivor who got a liver transplant during a 5 1/2-month medical leave last year, looked thin as he introduced the highly anticipated gadget, though he seemed to have more energy than he did at Apple’s last event in September.

The iPad has a 9.7-inch touch screen, is a half-inch thick, weighs 1.5 pounds and comes with 16, 32 or 64 gigabytes of flash memory storage. It comes with Wi-Fi and Bluetooth connectivity built in. Jobs said the device has a battery that lasts 10 hours and can sit for a month on standby without needing a charge.

The basic iPad models will cost $499, $599 and $699, depending on the storage size, when it comes out worldwide in March.

Apple will also sell a version with data plans from AT&T Inc. in the U.S.: $14.99 per month for 250 megabytes of data, or $29.99 for unlimited usage. Neither will require a long-term service contract.

Those 3G iPad models will cost more - $629, $729 and $829, depending on the amount of memory - and will be out in April. International cellular data details have not yet been announced.

Apple had kept its "latest creation" tightly under wraps until Wednesday’s unveiling, though many analysts had correctly speculated that it would be a one-piece tablet computer with a big touch screen, larger than an iPhone but smaller than a laptop.

Raven Zachary, a contributing analyst with mobile researchers The 451 Group, considered the iPad a laptop replacement, especially because Apple is also selling a dock with a built-in keyboard.

But Forrester Research analyst James McQuivey said he doesn’t believe the iPad added enough for consumers to justify buying yet another gadget, or to call this a new category of devices. In an e-mail, he criticized its lack of social features such as ways to share photos and home video and recommend books.

Sitting on stage in a cozy leather chair, Jobs demonstrated how the iPad is used for surfing the Web with Apple’s Safari browser. The CEO typed an e-mail using an on-screen keyboard and flipped through photo albums by flicking his finger across the screen. He also showed off a new electronic book store and a book-reading interface that emulates the look of a paper book, putting the iPad in competition with Amazon.com Inc.’s Kindle and other e-book readers.

Like iPods and the iPhone, the iPad can sync with Apple’s Macintosh and Microsoft’s Windows computers. Jobs said the iPad will also be better for playing games and watching video than either a laptop or a smart

phone. Software coming with the iPad includes a calendar, maps, a video player and iPod software for playing music. All seem to have been slightly redesigned to take advantage of the iPad’s bigger screen.

Tablet computers have existed for a decade, with little success. Jobs acknowledged Apple will have to work to convince consumers who already have smart phones and laptops that they need this gadget.

"In order to really create a new category of devices, those devices are going to have to be far better at doing some key tasks," Jobs said. "We think we’ve got the goods. We think we’ve done it."

Applications designed for the iPhone can run on the iPad. Apple is also releasing updated tools for software developers to help them build iPhone and iPad programs.

"We think it’s going to be a whole ’nother gold rush for developers as they build applications for the iPad," said Scott Forstall, an iPhone software executive.

A new newspaper reader program from The New York Times and a game from Electronic Arts Inc. were also demonstrated during the event. The audience, which included many journalists and bloggers, clapped and even gave Jobs a standing ovation.

Canada Privacy Office Launches New Facebook Probe

Canada’s privacy commissioner is once again probing Facebook over the online social network’s privacy policies.

The Privacy Commissioner of Canada said Wednesday it is investigating a complaint from a Facebook user over changes the company introduced in December.

The announcement came just five months after Facebook agreed to give users more control over the information they share with outside applications such as games and quizzes in response to concerns raised by Canadian privacy officials.

The latest complaints stem from changes Facebook made to give users more granular controls over what information is shared with others, while pushing users to be more open.

The complaint alleges that Facebook’s new, "default" settings made more information exposed than the user had previously intended. Facebook insists those settings were merely recommendations.

Elizabeth Denham, the assistant privacy commissioner, said some Facebook users have been disappointed at changes that were supposed to improve protection of their personal information.

Facebook, which is based in Palo Alto, Calif., said it has not seen the complaint but it is confident that its process last month was "consistent with user expectations, and within the law."

In the U.S., the Electronic Privacy Information Center and nine other organizations have also filed a complaint with the Federal Trade

Commission over last month’s changes.

Google Toolbar Still Spies When Told Not To

We have reported on Ben Edelman’s research in the past, including the recent past. The spyware researcher and Harvard B-School professor has demonstrated that the Google Toolbar continues to track a user’s searches even after the user has explicitly disabled it.

Edelman has plenty of other criticism for Google: He details tests which show that, even after the user disables "Google Toolbar" using the IE Manage Add-ons feature, it continues to report. The only possible explanation of this is that the monitoring components of Google Toolbar do not run as part of that Add-on. Perhaps there is a second add-on, not named as clearly, which Edelman didn’t notice. I’d test it myself, but I long-ago swore never to install the Google Toolbar ever again.

Edelman also shows how it’s too easy to enable the "Enhanced Features" which cause the transmission of full browsing details to Google, and it’s not all that easy to disable them. Google forcefully urges you to activate them and tells you how important they are. At the same time they present the privacy policy in a way that’s difficult to read.

He concludes with advice for how Google should address the problems he describes, much of which has to do with improving their disclosure.

In Bid for More Users, eBay Changes Fees

EBay, in a bid to attract more users, cut the fees on Tuesday it charges for listing on the online auction site and did away with upfront payments for occasional sellers.

The San Jose, California-based eBay said that beginning on March 30, items with a starting price of 99 cents or less will be listed for free with eBay taking nine percent of the final sale price but never more than 50 dollars.

Sellers will be allowed 100 free listings per month, eBay said.

EBay said that for sellers who list often, it was now offering fees of as low as three cents per listing for 30 days. It said that was a 90 percent reduction from its current rates.

EBay said this could save high-volume sellers - those with 250 listings per month - up to nearly 1,000 dollars a year in fees.

EBay said the new "success-based pricing" had already been put in place in Europe and had driven strong growth in Britain and Germany.

FBI Arrests Alleged Cable Modem Hacker

U.S. federal authorities arrested a 26-year-old man on Thursday for allegedly selling modified cable modems that enabled free Internet access, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

Matthew Delorey of New Bedford, Connecticut, is charged with one count of conspiracy and one count of wire fraud. If convicted, he could face up to 20 years in prison for each charge, and a $250,000 fine.

Delorey allegedly ran a now-defunct Web site called Massmodz.com, where hacked modems were sold. The modems had been modified in order to spoof the device's MAC (Media Access Control) address. It is possible then to either obtain free Internet access or make it appear that a different modem is obtaining access.

Authorities alleged that Delorey sold two of the modified modems to an undercover agent of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The videos Delorey allegedly posted to YouTube showing how to get free Internet access through modified cable modems probably won't help his case.

He allegedly posted instructional videos with titles such as "Massmodz.com How to Get Free Internet Free Cable Internet Comcast or any Cable ISP - 100% works" and "Massmodz.com How to bypass Comcast registration page with premod cable modem SB5100, SB 5101."

Federal authorities have recently moved against other people regarding cable modems. In October Ryan Harris, 26, was arrested for allegedly running a San Diego company called TCNISO that sold customizable cable modems and software that could be used to get free Internet service or a speed boost for paying subscribers. Harris is charged with conspiracy, computer intrusion and wire fraud.

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